

Low and High Velocity Impact Response of Thick Hybrid Composites

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ABSTRACT

The effects of low and high velocity impact on thick hybrid composites (THC's) were experimentally compared. Test Beams consisted of CFRP skins which were bonded onto an interleaved syntactic foam core and cured at 177°C (350 °F). The impactor tip for both cases was a 16 mm (0.625") steel hemisphere. In spite of the order of magnitude difference in velocity ranges and impactor weights, similar relationships between impact energy, damage size, and residual strength were found. The dependence of the skin compressive strength on damage size agree well with analytical open hole models for composite laminates and may enable the prediction of ultimate performance for the damaged composite, based on visual inspection.

NOMENCLATURE

a_{oc} : Free parameter in Average Stress Criterion for compression.

E_x : Young's modulus in x-direction.

E_y : Young's modulus in y-direction.

ν_{xy} : Poisson's Ratio.

G_{xy} : Shear Modulus.

K_T : Stress Concentration Factor for Infinite Width.

R : Hole Radius.

W : Sandwich Panel Width.

Y : Finite Width Correction Factor.

σ_N : Unnotched Strength.

σ_N : Notched Strength for Infinite Width.

σ_N : Notched Strength.

INTRODUCTION

Extensive research on carbon-epoxy laminates has clearly shown that these materials can only accommodate impact energy by developing internal damage which is mainly in the form of a delamination failure mode. The residual compressive strength performance is therefore severely impaired, and may limit the use of these laminates to secondary structures. An additional drawback is that the damage, in most cases, is not detectable by visual examination. Publications which compare low and high-velocity impact response of laminates are rare. Cantwell and Morton (1989) choose a 6 mm (0.236") hemisphere to impact Grafil XA-S/BSL914C laminates with thicknesses varying from 4 to 64 plies. They found that for conditions of low velocity impact, the size and the shape of the target determines its energy absorbing capacity and therefore its impact response. High velocity impact loading induces a localized form of target response and the level of damage incurred does not, therefore, appear to be governed by the areal size of the component. They further concluded that high velocity impact loading by a small projectile is generally more detrimental to the integrity of a composite structure than low-velocity drop-weight impact loading. Moon and Shively (1990) choose a 12.7 mm (0.5") hemisphere to impact 48 ply laminates made of AS4-1806, AS4-934, and IM7-8551-7 prepregs respectively. Their findings were similar to those reported by Cantwell and Morton.

A more comprehensive literature review, on damage tolerance of composites in general was published by Abrate (1991) and by Ishai and Hiel (1992).

Traditionally, sandwich constructions consist of three main parts; two thin, stiff and strong skins separated by a thick, light, and weaker core. The skins are adhesively bonded onto the core to enable load transfer between the components. Composite sandwich construction has been found to be a very efficient way to utilize composite laminates and is therefore used extensively and very successfully in industry. Until recently, the main emphasis was on secondary structural components which require high strength and high stiffness-to-weight ratios. Several damage tolerance studies have been conducted on sandwich constructions having carbon-epoxy skin layers and honeycomb or lightweight foam core. Nevertheless, to the best of the author's knowledge, no work was found that compares the low and high-velocity impact response of

sandwich panels with a structural (syntactic) foam core. This type of material is subsequently referred to as a thick hybrid composite (THC).

Studies on the impact response of THC's have recently been performed (Ishai and Hiel 1992). This paper discusses the relevant details on fabrication, the experimental conditions for low and high-velocity impact, and the inspection and characterization of the impact damage. The relationship between damage size and residual strength is represented by an analytical model. The paper closes with a comparison of the effect of impact energy on the residual strength for both low and high-velocity impacts.

MATERIALS AND FABRICATION

An illustration of the thick hybrid composite is shown in Figure 1a. It consists of the following components:

1. A skin laminate, composed of 18 plies of prepreg (G40-600/5245C) with a (0/+30/-30)_{3s} layup.
2. An external layer for skin protection, composed of two glass fiber fabric 7781/5245 C prepreg layers.
3. A layer of FM300 adhesive.
4. A layer of 7781/5245 C prepreg at +45/-45 orientation.
5. Three layers of syntactic foam (Syntac 350).

The fabrication is as follows: First, the layers of syntactic foam core are cut. Then the different parts, shown in figure 1a, are laid-up into an aluminum mold. After the layup is completed, the mold is closed, vacuum bagged and transferred to a press with heated platens. The whole assembly is subjected to a 350°F cure cycle after which it is demolded.

It should be noted that this fabrication process has great technological significance since it is also applicable to sandwich constructions with complex geometries because the foam can be cast into any desired shape.

Sandwich beams, with dimensions shown in figure 1b, were cut from the sandwich panel using a diamond tipped bandsaw. The edges were then polished with a diamond coated sander.

IMPACT LOADING

Low velocity Impact

Low velocity impact tests were conducted using a conventional dropweight test rig. An 86 N (19.3 lbs) impactor with a 16 mm (0.625") hemispherical tip was allowed to fall freely from heights ranging from 0.30 m (1

ft) to 2.13 m (7 ft) thereby creating impact velocities ranging from 2.4 m/sec (7.9 ft/sec) to 6 m/sec (19.7 ft/sec). The sandwich beams were simply supported with the distance between the supports being 0.203 m (8").

High Velocity Impact

High velocity impact tests were performed using an airgun. Air with a pressure up to 1.03 Mpa (150 psi) was fed to a chamber. At this point the air was restrained by a plastic diaphragm. When the pressure in the chamber reached a pre-determined value, a small electric current, passed through a piece of resistance wire located at the center of the diaphragm precipitated its rupture and the release of the air. The rapid expansion of the air accelerated a sabot/projectile combination along the length of the 1.79 m (70") barrel. Upon reaching the end of the barrel, the sabot is stopped by a tapered tube (sabot-catcher) allowing the 17 gram (0.04 lbs) projectile to continue free flight and strike the simply supported sandwich beam. The terminal velocities obtained ranged from 40 m/sec (130 ft/sec) to 160 m/sec (525 ft/sec). The velocity was measured by digital clocks which were activated by trip wires located at three locations in the barrel. Both the impactor and the sandwich beams had the same geometry as in the low velocity impact tests.

DAMAGE INSPECTION AND CHARACTERIZATION

The design of the sandwich panels allowed for the extent of damage to be easily differentiated by visual inspection. It was observed that any low or high-speed impact causes a localized damage and delamination of the surface layer of glass-epoxy. The circular delamination is easily visible in both cases and therefore sophisticated NDT equipment is not needed for an initial damage assessment. Cross sectional cutting through the damaged zone was routinely conducted to relate the observed surface- damage and the actual delamination between the skin and the core. Figure 2 indicates that the low velocity impact causes an indentation while the tangential elastic displacements of the contact surfaces cause the formation of a cone crack. Figure 3. is representative for a high-velocity impact with the same energy (and for the same shape of the impactor). The permanent indentation induced by the low speed impactor appears to be deeper than that induced by the high speed impactor at the same impact energy. Additionally, there is substantially more delamination present in the case of high velocity impact. In summary one can state that the impacted skin of a THC at low velocity, as shown in Figure 2. is very similar to the impact damage inflicted on thermoplastic laminates (Starnes and Williams 1983). The impacted skin of a THC at high velocity, as shown in Figure 3. has damage which is very similar to that inflicted on thermoset laminates. It is therefore likely that rate dependence of stiffness and strength in the z-direction needs to be introduced in future mathematical models for THC's.

Further evaluation of the damage mechanism is obtained by relating the damage size to the impact energy as shown in Figure 4. As can be seen, damage caused by both low and high-velocity impacts have a similar dependence on the energy. Final conclusions cannot be formulated at this time, because the damage caused by high velocity impacts has more scatter at the higher impact energies.

Following damage characterization, the sandwich beams were subject to four point bending. The distance between the supports was chosen as 0.33 m (13") with a distance between the loads of 0.076 m (3"). Each THC was loaded with the damaged skin on the compressive side. Strength was defined as the Skin Stress at Failure (SSF).

RESIDUAL STRENGTH

The low and high-velocity impact damage was localized, and is therefore expected to have only a limited effect on the beam stiffness. They act, however, as stress raisers and can therefore have a significant effect on laminate strength. This is evident from figure 5, where the residual strength is plotted as a function of damage diameter. Again it can be seen that there is basically no difference between reduction in strength due to low and high-velocity impacts. The solid curve was obtained by using the Whitney-Nuismer (1974) average stress failure criterion which leads to the following Equation:

$$\sigma_N = \frac{\sigma_N^{\infty}}{Y(2R/W)}$$

which states that the notched strength (which is experimentally measurable) can be obtained by dividing the strength of an infinitely wide laminate by a correction factor Y , which is can be calculated as follows;

$$Y(2R/W) = \frac{2 + \left(1 - \frac{2R}{W}\right)^3}{3 \left(1 - \frac{2R}{W}\right)}$$

strictly speaking, this equation is only correct for isotropic laminates and therefore Y is called the "isotropic finite width correction factor". Gillespie et al (1988) have shown nevertheless that the above expression is applicable to orthotropic laminates for d/W values smaller than .25, which was the case in this investigation.

According to Whitney and Nuismer (1974) the notched strength of an infinitely wide orthotropic plate is related to the unnotched strength by the following equation;

$$\sigma_N^* = \frac{2\sigma_0(1-\xi)}{[2-\xi^2-\xi^3+(K_T^*-3)(\xi^6-\xi^8)]}$$

with

$$\xi = \frac{R}{R+a_{oc}}$$

and

$$K_T^* = 1 + \left\{ 2 \left[\left(\frac{E_x}{E_y} \right)^{0.5} - \nu_{xy} + \frac{E_x}{2G_{xy}} \right] \right\}^{0.5}$$

The equations were originally used to predict the variation of tensile strength due to a through the thickness hole (or notch) in a multi-ply laminate. The quantity a_{oc} was introduced to represent a characteristic damage zone in the highly stressed region adjacent to the hole. The distance is used as a free parameter to be determined by fitting experimental data assuming an average stress over the damage zone. This criterion has been extended to include compression loaded laminates by Nuismer and Labor (1979).

Our basic assumption in using the described analytical approach to THC's, is that the impact damages material over a radius R , and that this material no longer participates in the load transfer process within the laminate. Therefore the damaged material can effectively be thought of as nonexistent and be considered as a hole with radius R . The parameter a_{oc} for the present data was found to be 6.09 mm (0.24"), which is very close to the result obtained by Nuismer and Labor (1979) on a carbon epoxy laminate.

Figure 6 relates the residual strength to the impact energy, and shows that both the low and high-velocity data can be merged onto a single master curve. It may therefore be concluded that impact energy is the single most important factor to control residual strength reduction of structural sandwich panels with interleaved core (provided the same impactor tip is used).

CONCLUSIONS

- o Damage size was found to be similar for both low and high velocity impacts having the same energy.
- o Damage microstructure was found to resemble thermoplastic materials at low impact velocity and thermoset laminates at high impact velocity.

- o Reduction in residual strength is directly controlled by the impact energy, while impact velocity plays a minor role.
- o The Whitney-Nuismer average stress criterion, for open hole laminates, provides an appropriate presentation of the experimental data which relates damage size to residual strength.

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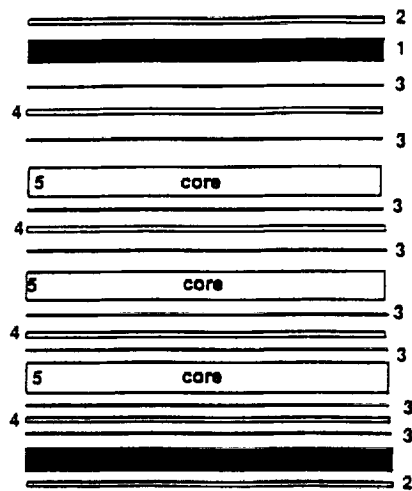


Fig. 1(a) Identification of materials in interleaved sandwich panels

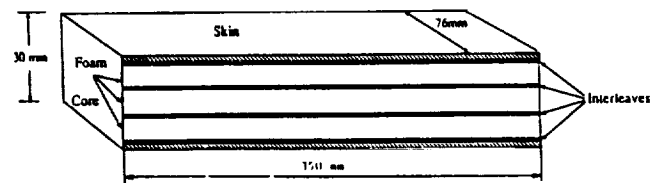


Fig. 1(b) Principal dimensions of Interleaved beam

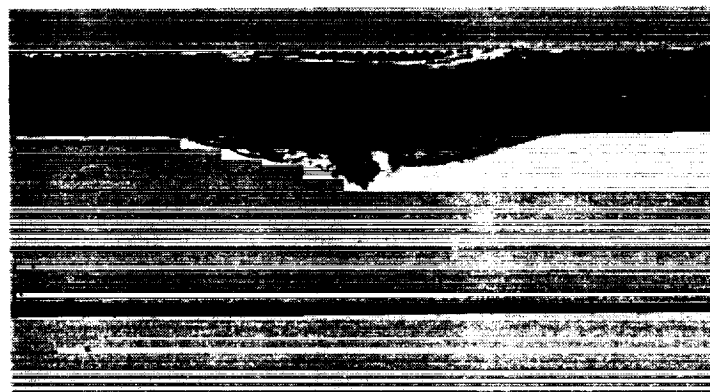


Fig. 2 Low-velocity impact damage: cross-sectional view

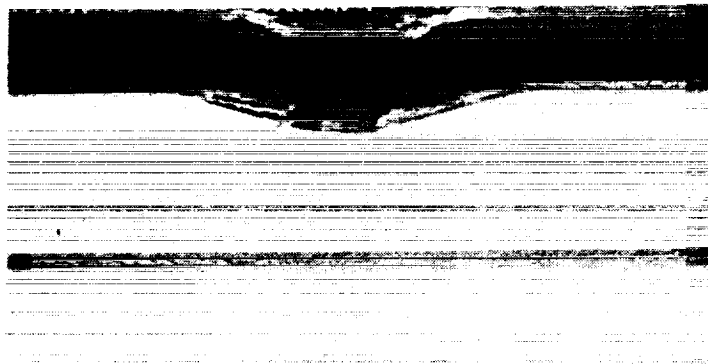


Fig. 3 High-velocity impact damage: cross-sectional view

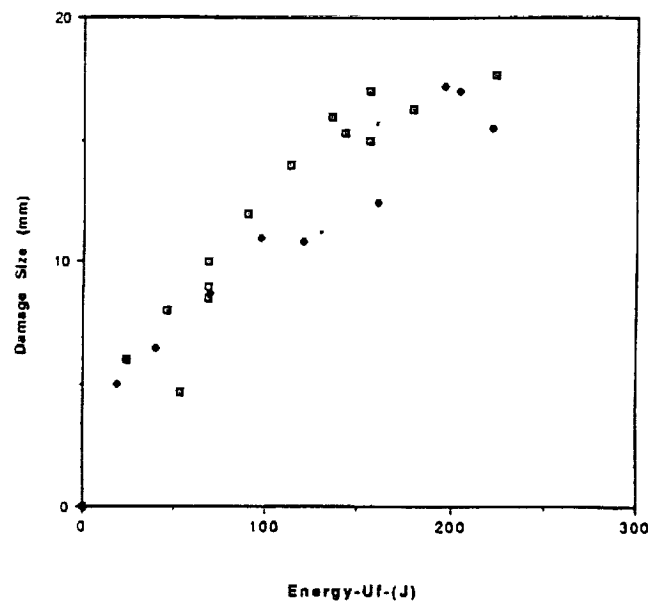


Fig. 4 Dependence of damage size on impact energy

- low velocity impact
- ◆ high velocity impact

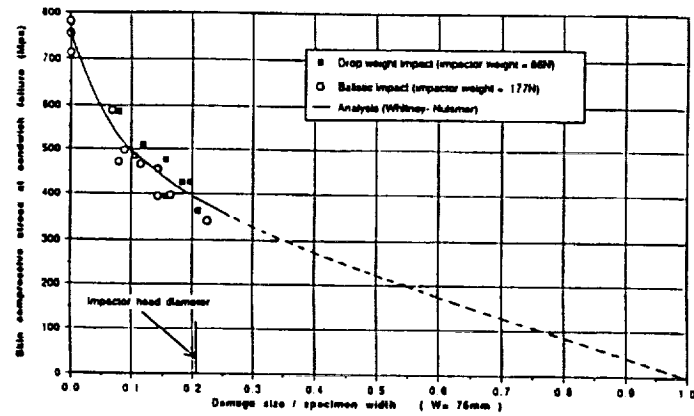


Fig. 5 Dependence of residual strength on damage size
(normalized by specimen width)

- low velocity impact
- high velocity impact

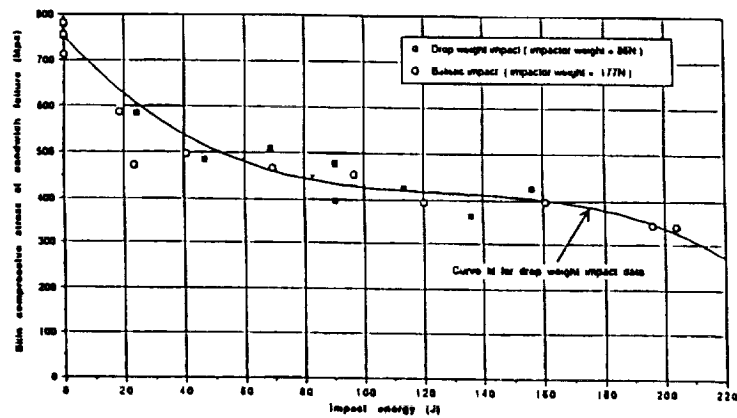


Fig. 6 Dependence of residual strength on impact energy

- low velocity impact
- high velocity impact

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Damage Tolerance of a Composite Sandwich with Interleaved Foam Core

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ABSTRACT: A composite sandwich panel consisting of carbon fiber-reinforced plastic (CFRP) skins and a syntactic foam core was selected as an appropriate structural concept for the design of wind tunnel compressor blades. Interleaving of the core with tough interlayers was done to prevent core cracking and improve damage tolerance of the sandwich. Simply supported sandwich beam specimens were subjected to low-velocity, drop-weight impacts as well as high-velocity, ballistic impacts. The performance of the interleaved core sandwich panels was characterized by localized skin damage and minor cracking of the core. Residual compressive strength (RCS) of the skin, which was derived from flexural test, shows the expected trend of decreasing with increasing size of the damage, impact energy, and velocity. In the case of skin damage, RCS values of around 50% of the virgin interleaved reference were obtained at the upper impact energy range. Based on the similarity between low velocity and ballistic impact effects, it was concluded that impact energy is the main variable controlling damage and residual strength, where as velocity plays a minor role. The superiority (in damage tolerance) of the composite sandwich with interleaved foam core, as compared with its plain version, is well established. This is attributable to the toughening effect of the interlayers which serve the dual role of crack arrestor and energy absorber of the impact loading.

KEYWORDS: damage, damage tolerance, impact, ballistic impact, impact velocity, impact energy, sandwich beam, interleaving, syntactic foam, residual strength, carbon fiber-reinforced foam

Nomenclature

BVD	Barely visible damage
CFRP	Carbon fiber-reinforced plastic
CTE	Coefficient of thermal expansion
DTC	Damage tolerance characteristics
DTE	Damage tolerance evaluation
FRP	Fiber-reinforced plastics
GFRP	Glass fiber-reinforced plastic
HC	Honeycomb core

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RT	Room temperature conditions
RCS	Residual compressive strength
SSSF	Skin maximum compressive stress at sandwich failure
b	Sandwich width
d_i	Impactor diameter
E_{11}, E_{22}	Lamina longitudinal and transverse elastic moduli, respectively
F_{1t}, F_{2t}	Lamina longitudinal and transverse tensile strength, respectively
F_{1c}, F_{2c}	Lamina longitudinal and transverse compressive strength, respectively
F_6	Lamina in-plane shear strength
G_{12}	Lamina in-plane shear modulus
g	Constant of gravity
H	Drop-weight height
h	Sandwich thickness
L_0	Sandwich span
t	Skin thickness
t_0	Ply thickness
W_i	Impactor weight
α_1, α_2	Lamina longitudinal and transverse CTE, respectively
ν_{12}	Lamina longitudinal Poisson's ratio

Introduction

Composite materials are considered to be good candidates for replacing metals in helicopter and compressor blades applications. This is due to their superior mechanical properties such as: high strength and stiffness per unit weight, long fatigue life, durability, and better damage tolerance characteristics (DTC). The last advantage has been shown to be of major importance by past failures of aluminum wind tunnel blades. NASA Ames promoted a research and development (R&D) project to provide input data for comparing composites and aluminum design alternatives for wind tunnel compressor rotor blades. A composite sandwich structure composed of CFRP skins and foam core was chosen as an appropriate concept. The effect of impact on damage and consequential residual strength were selected as a major subject for investigation. At an early stage of the research it was found that an elevated-temperature-cured sandwich, with a full depth plain syntactic foam, was highly sensitive to impact loading. This was manifested by extensive cracking of the core and poor residual strength. To reduce this effect, the core was toughened by interleaving with adhesive and glass/epoxy interlayers.

The main objective of the present investigation was to provide experimental data for damage tolerance evaluation (DTE) of this complex composite sandwich system.

Damage Tolerance Methodology for Structural Composite Laminates

Most investigations dealing with DTE are aimed at three main objectives:

- The assessment of structural performance under static or cyclic loads or both as well as survivability of structural elements, which were previously damaged by accidental impact.
- To provide guidelines and allowables for design and quality assurance of composite structures which are likely to sustain impact damage and where DTE has to be considered.
- Ranking, for material selection purpose, of different composite systems based on their response to impact and their residual structural performance.

The first issue is of major concern for aircraft industries and certification authorities. For this purpose, some specifications and requirements based on DTE have been proposed [1,2]. These assessments are mainly related to critical levels of impact energy and damage size. Another DTE classification is defined as "barely visible damage" (BVD) threshold. Data on carbon-epoxy laminates indicate that at BVD level, compression strength after impact may decrease to as low as 40% of the undamaged reference strength. The respective level of residual compressive strain seems, nowadays, to be the accepted allowable design limit for high performance carbon-epoxy composites in structural aircraft applications. Most investigations that are concerned with material selection are based on several attempts to standardize DTE testing methods [3,4]. This effort is essential because of the high sensitivity of the composite to the impact test variables such as: the impactor diameter, the specimen geometry, and its boundary conditions [5-7].

The effect of impact velocity has also been considered. There is a clear distinction between the low velocity drop-weight test and the high velocity (ballistic) test as a result of their probable different effects on damage characteristics [8-10]. The effect of material composition on DTE can only be evaluated by keeping a uniform test method. Several investigations that have used the clamped plate [8,11,12] or narrow beam configurations [13] have indicated a strong effect of different material parameters on DTE, namely: variation in layer stacking sequence, using thermoplastic rather than thermoset resin as a matrix, interleaving the laminate with tougher plies, and so forth. During the last decade, most of the publications on DTE were limited to composite laminates. Studies on the effect of impact on damage and residual performance of substructural elements such as sandwich panels have been less frequent, possibly as a result of the numerous parameters and the complexity involved.

Damage Tolerance Evaluation of Composite Sandwich Panels

Composite skins in sandwich panels subjected to flexural impact behave entirely different than plate laminates mainly for the following two reasons. First, the skin is under plane axial loads when the sandwich is under flexure, hence, interlaminar shear stresses are confined mainly to the local impacted zone. Second, the core provides a relatively soft substrate which locally

may absorb the impact energy. The weak link in sandwiches in many cases is the core material, which may fail by shear or tensile stresses induced under flexural impact. Most of the publications on this topic deal with sandwiches composed of honeycomb core and CFRP skins. Similar to the DTE of laminates, the evaluation of sandwiches is treated at three levels, namely: the effect of fabrication flaws, artificial flaws, and impact damage.

The following types of flaws as a result of fabrication may be detected: cracks in the core caused by thermal curing stresses, partial separations at bonded interfaces in the core and between core and skins, skin transverse cracking, and delaminations. Core flaws were found to affect sandwich performance as a result of the reduction in its shear strength and modulus [14,15]. Interfacial separation also has a significant effect on strength above critical debonding length and depends on skin configuration [16]. To enable the evaluation and prediction of the effects of flaw size and location on the composite sandwich performance, artificial flaws are inserted into the sandwich structure. Information from these studies may lead to the definition of flaw criticality and the related strength which is essential for sandwich design and quality assurance. In most cases, artificial flaws are embedded within one of the skins in a sandwich which is subjected to flexure or compressive loading up to failure [17,18]. Analytical models are based, in many cases, on the sublaminar buckling mechanism of delaminated composites [19,20]. It has been claimed that damage caused by low velocity impact has the most severe effect on laminate and sandwich performance [1]. Tests conducted on CFRP skin and honeycomb (HC) core have indicated that, at BVD level and above, damage is characterized by local fiber breakage and delamination of the impacted skin [21]. Residual strength in most cases is below 50% of the nondamaged reference. Analytical model predictions gave more conservative results than experimental data. It was concluded, in other investigations, that impact energy to failure increases with skin thickness and its rigidity [22]. Increasing honeycomb density tends to improve damage tolerance, but cell dimension has only a minor effect.

Several investigations dealt with the effect of ballistic impact when a small diameter impactor was used [23-25]. In most cases, the damage was characterized by combined fiber fractures and local internal delaminations. This failure mode may be modeled as a hole through the skin. Predictions of residual strength, based on this model, are in good agreement with experimental findings [26]. Investigation into the effect of cyclic compressive loading [25,27] has indicated that even at BVD level, fatigue life may be reduced as a result of propagation of delaminations and interfacial separations which were formed during impact.

Several investigations deal with the effect of impact on sandwiches with different combinations of skin and core materials such as: aluminum, glass-phenolic and Nomex[®] honeycombs, three-dimensional (3-D) fabric, and Rohacell[®] foam. Skins, in most cases, are composed of graphite-epoxy [28-31]. Tests have shown that by proper selection of core material, adhesive, and hybridization with tougher fibers, the mechanical properties of the sandwich may be varied widely with corresponding improvement in impact energy absorption. Recently, attention has shifted toward attempting to understand and predict the behavior under impact of basic structural composite elements which are mainly used in aircraft applications [32,33]. Such studies try to establish a more standardized DTE approach for structures and provide guidelines for improving the damage tolerance by proper selection of materials and composite layout variable.

The Effect of Interleaving

During the last decade, many efforts have been dedicated toward improving fracture toughness and damage tolerance of advanced composites with brittle epoxy matrices designated for elevated temperature applications. A comprehensive review of this topic [34] summarizes the different techniques, test methods, and properties of toughened composites. One of the most promising approaches was the interleaving of the carbon-epoxy laminates by softer and tougher materials such as adhesive films. It was found that interleaving may reduce interlaminar stresses at critical locations [35], hereby significantly increasing the interlaminar fracture toughness, decreasing and controlling impact damage, and improving RCS [13,36,37]. This approach was extended to include different interleaving materials such as thermoplastic films and hybridization using tougher FRP interlayers [38–40]. It was also used successfully at the structural element level [41,42]. To the best knowledge of the authors, the interleaving method has not been used in conjunction with syntactic foams. While this is probably a result of the limited application to date of these foams in high performance sandwich structures, it is, however, reasonable to assume that the interleaving technique may significantly improve impact damaging effect and subsequent residual strength of sandwiches composed of these core materials.

Concluding Remarks

Based on the above literature review and information on mechanics of sandwich structures, the following general comments may be concluded in relevance with the present investigation:

- The composite skin is the backbone of the sandwich structure and provides its strength and stiffness.
- The main function of the core is to support the skins to avoid local buckling and to absorb energy as a result of local impact. It must also possess enough strength and stiffness for the transfer of shear and tensile stresses under flexural loading.
- Syntactic foams, which are composed of epoxy resin reinforced with glass microballoons, have higher density than other foams and HC cores. They possess, however, better strength and stiffness characteristics as required for high performance structural sandwich applications.
- Syntactic foams for elevated temperature applications (350°F [176.6°C]) may be cracked under impact loading because of their relative high brittleness and induced curing tensile stresses due to their high coefficient of thermal expansion. Interleaving techniques, which have been proven successful for composite laminates, offer promise for improving damage tolerance characteristics of syntactic foam sandwich structures.

Objectives

The objectives of the present research are as follows:

- Study the effect of impact loading on damage and subsequent residual strength of composite sandwiches with syntactic foam cores.
- Develop a database for interleaved core sandwich structure taking into account damage tolerance considerations.
- Investigate the effect of core composition parameters on DTC to provide design guidelines for optimizing sandwich postimpact structural performance.

Materials and Specimens

Sandwich structures are usually composed of three main components, namely, skins, core, and an adhesive which bonds them together. In the present case, a fourth phase, the interleaved layers, is added. All of the constituent materials for the above components were cured at 177°C (350°F) and are designated to be used under service conditions of up to 122°C (250°F).

Constituent Materials

The structural **skins** were fabricated from unidirectional carbon fiber-reinforced bismaleimide (CFRP) prepreg tapes (Rigidite G40-600/5245C) supplied by BASF. Each skin consisted of 18 plies (average ply thickness of 0.14 mm) with the following layup: $(0/+30/-30)_s$. Two layers of BASF glass fabric-reinforced epoxy (GFRP) prepreps (7781/5245C) were added for external protection of each skin. The **core** was made of prefabricated solid syntactic foam (Syntac 350) supplied by Grace Syntactic. It is composed of epoxy resin filled with glass microballoons having the density of about 0.6g/cm³. The **adhesive** used was FM300 prepreg film made by American Cyanamid Corp. The **interleaved** phases consisted of one ply of glass fabric prepreg oriented at $\pm 45^\circ$ to the beam axis embedded between two plies of adhesive film.

Sandwich Specimens

A typical sandwich specimen configuration with interleaved core is illustrated in Fig. 1. It consists of two CFRP skins with the GFRP fabric coating and three foam core layers which are bonded together with the skins by four interleaves. In the case of plain core reference specimens, the skins were bonded to the core with adhesive film (FM300). Sandwich panels were fabricated by cocuring of the skin plies and interleave prepreps together with the solid core pieces by means of a press-molding process (under pressure of about 6 atm). Two types of specimens were cut from the cured panels as follows:

- Long beams of about 350 by 76 by 30 mm for residual strength tests.
- Short beams of about 210 by 76 by 30 mm for cross-sectional damage assessment.

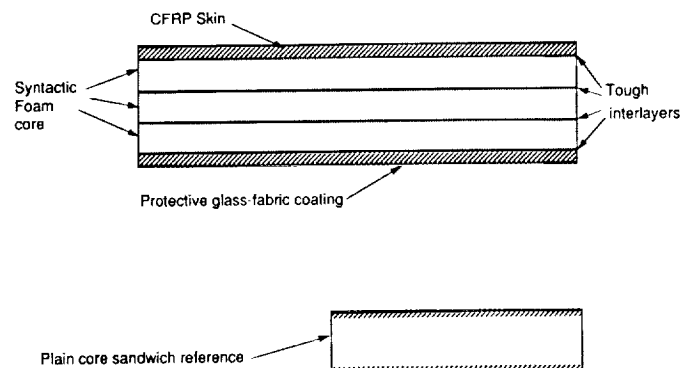


FIG. 1—Typical configuration of composite sandwich with interleaved core and plain core sandwich reference.

After rough cutting with a carbide-coated saw, the specimens' edges were machined and polished under water by means of a diamond powder-coated disk to attain smooth and parallel surfaces.

Characteristics of Sandwich Constituents

The basic mechanical properties of the cured, unidirectional CFRP lamina, the GFRP fabric, the syntactic foam, and the adhesive layers are given in Table 1. They are designated for the cured state at room temperature (RT) dry condition. Most of the constituents' data were obtained from the available literature and supplier information. The properties of the syntactic foam were obtained independently following ASTM test standards (ASTM Test for Tensile Properties of Plastics [D 638], ASTM Test for Flatwise Compressive Strength of Sandwich Cores [C 365], and ASTM Test for Shear Properties in Flatwise Plane of Flat Sandwich Constructions or Sandwich Cores [C 273]). Most of the CFRP skin properties were computed based on the respective lamina inputs, using composite laminate analysis, except for the compressive strength (F_{1c}) and the coefficients of thermal expansion (α_1, α_2) which were obtained experimentally.

Test Procedure

A flow chart of the research program and test procedure is shown in Fig. 2. Accordingly, two identical series of specimens were subjected to low velocity and ballistic impact loading. After visual damage assessment, these specimens were loaded in flexure to failure for residual strength determination. Damage tolerance characteristics of interleaved and plain core reference sandwich configurations were evaluated based on the relationships between impact variables and damage characteristics and between these parameters and residual strength.

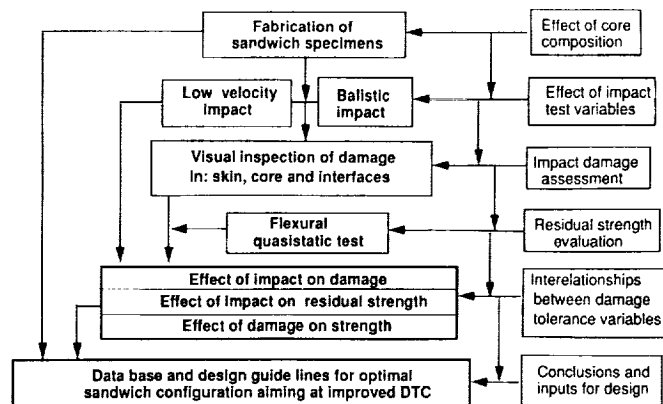


FIG. 2—Scheme of research program and test procedure.

Impact Testing

Two types of impact tests were designated to represent the range of impact events which may occur to compressor blades during installation, maintenance, and wind tunnel operation. They are commonly defined as low velocity (drop-weight test) and high velocity (ballistic test), respectively. An illustration and basic specifications of these tests for the present investigation are shown in Fig. 3. There is a large difference in impact velocity and impactor weight between the two tests; however, to get a reliable comparison between low and high velocity tests the impactor head geometry was kept identical in the two cases.

Drop-Weight Impact Test

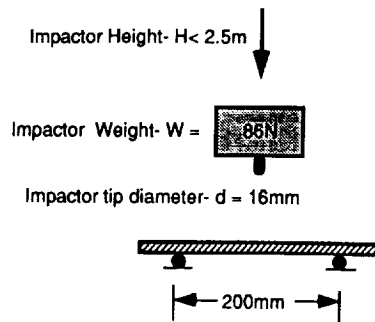
The instrumented impact system comprises of a Impact 66 test machine made by Monterey Research Laboratories. The maxi-

TABLE 1—Sandwich constituents properties.

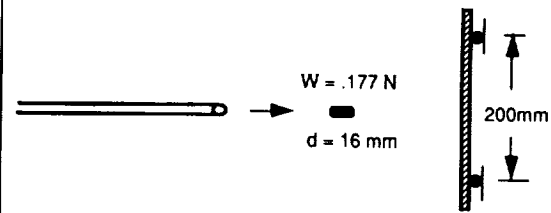
	ELASTIC PROPERTIES				STRENGTH PROPERTIES					C.T.E		Thick.
UNITS	GPa				MPa					$C^{-1} \times 10^{-6}$		(mm)
MATERIAL	E11	E22	G12	ν_{12}	F1t	F1c	F2t	F2c	F6	α_1	α_2	t o
CFRP G40-600 5245C	170	11.8	5.2	.33	2070	1380	75	251	102	-.3	28	.14
GFRP Fabric 7781 5245C	30.3	30.3	5.4	.17	374	560	374	560	99	9.9	9.9	.24
Syntactic Foam 350C	2.26	2.26	.84	.31	27	54.6	27	54.6	25	48*	48*	
Adhesive FM300 .08psf	2.45	2.45	.88	.38	53	98	53	98	35	77	77	.26
CFRP Skin (0/30/-30) _{3s} (**)	97.2	14.8	24.5	1.21	936	660	70	289	153	-3.3*	15.1*	2.52

*) Coefficient of Thermal Expansion Values were determined experimentally at temperature range of 20-120°C

**) Most of CFRP skin properties were computed based on the respective lamina inputs, except α_1 , α_2 and F_{1c} which were derived experimentally.

Low velocity, (Drop weight) set-up

Velocity range : up to 6 m/sec
Energy range : up to 160 J

High velocity (ballistic), Air-gun set-up

Velocity range : up to 160 m/sec
Energy range : up to 220 J

FIG. 3—Illustration of setups for two types of impact tests.

mum tower height is about 3.0 m. The impactor comprises of a 16-mm-diameter hemispherical tip (hardened steel) attached to a rigid base with the assembly weighing 86 N. The impactor is raised to the required height by the hydraulic system and released pneumatically. Its rebound is arrested automatically by a braking system to insure a single-impact event. During the fall, the impactor is guided by two lubricated circular columns. To account for the friction during falling, the exact values of impact variables were derived experimentally. The velocity was determined optically by measuring the elapsed time between two photo cells. The actual maximum velocity and the derived kinetic energy just before the collision are plotted as functions of the drop height in Fig. 4 in comparison with the respective predicted curves. The

lower values of the measured velocity and energy variables as compared to the predicted ones are attributed mainly to frictional resistance to the falling weight. The average calculated drop acceleration was about 0.88g. The dynamic response of the system during the impact process was monitored by a dynamic signal analyzer Type 3562A made by Hewlett Packard using accelerometer Type 2252 made by Endevco which was attached to the top of the impactor. Most of the impacted sandwich beam specimens were simply supported on two rollers having a span of about 200 mm. Typical acceleration and the integrated velocity versus time responses recorded during impact of interleaved and plain core sandwiches are shown in Figs. 5 and 6, respectively.

The acceleration response in Fig. 5, which is typical for the

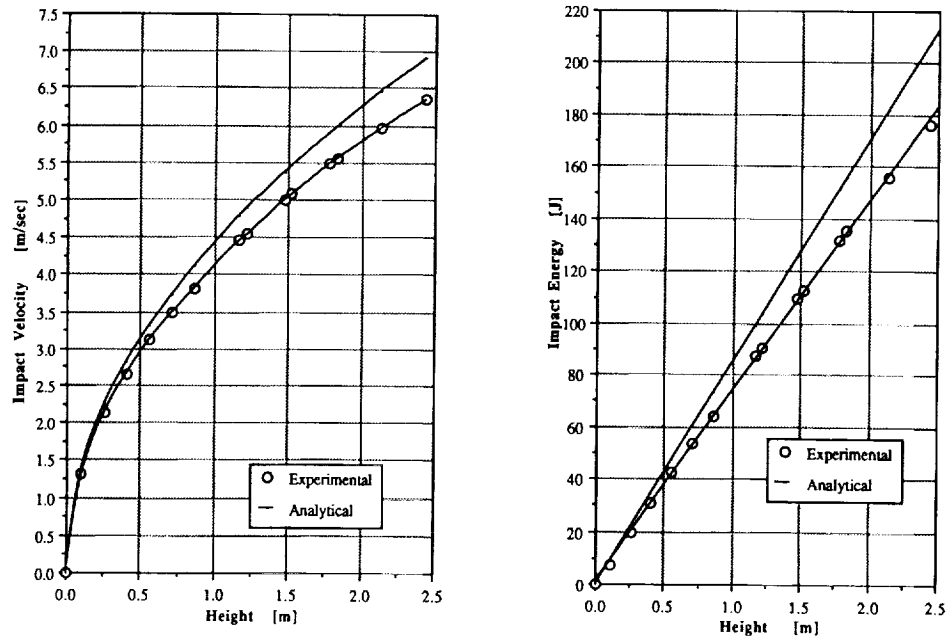


FIG. 4—Calibration curves of impact variables as function of drop-weight height.

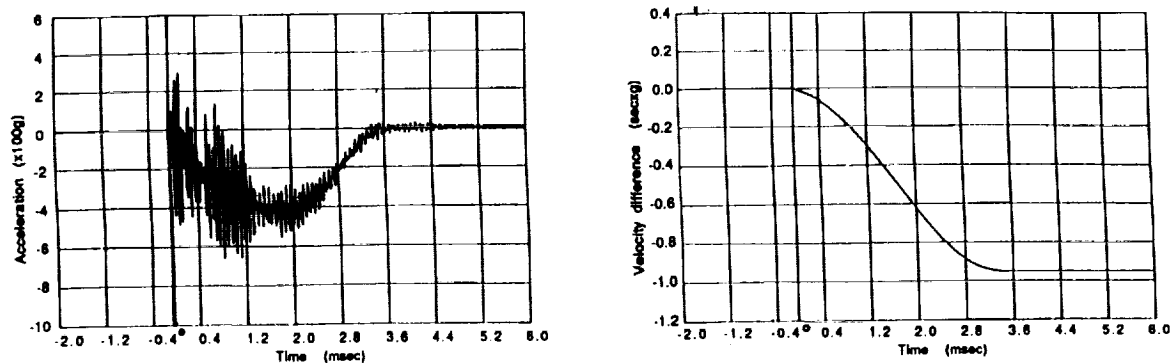


FIG. 5—Typical acceleration and velocity response curves for **interleaved core sandwich**. Recorded during low velocity impact test (input energy: 156 J) (skin damage only).

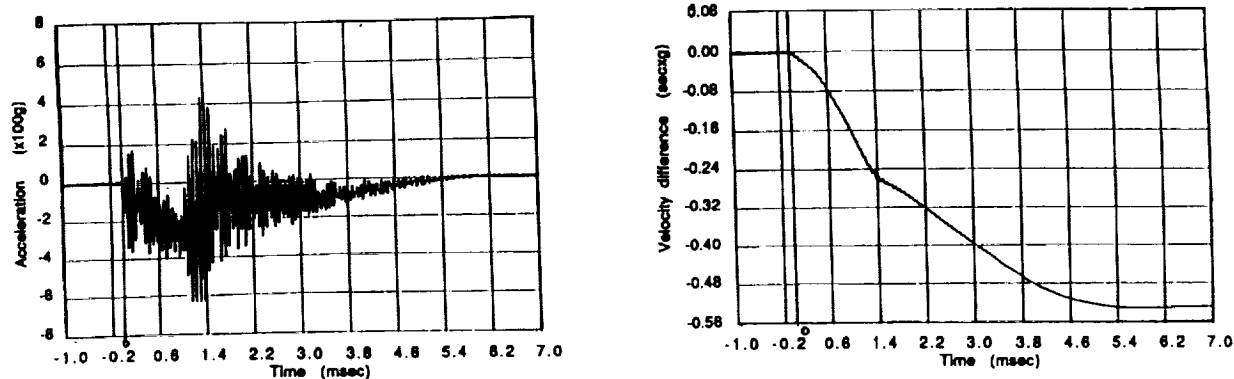


FIG. 6—Typical acceleration and velocity response curves for **plain core sandwich**. Recorded during low velocity impact test (input energy: 68.7J) (core damage mainly).

noncracked interleaved core sandwich, shows a trend towards a minimum (or maximum deceleration) which is not easy to define quantitatively as a result of the graph fluctuations. The velocity curve, which is obtained by integration of the acceleration graph, is smooth and continuous and allows precise determination of the minimum acceleration from its extreme slope. The difference between the input impactor velocity and response velocity is used for computation of energy loss as a result of energy absorbed, mainly by the skin local damage during the impact process. On the other hand, the response of the plain core sandwich to the impact is different (Fig. 6). It is characterized by a highly scattered acceleration graph with no trend at all and a discontinuous velocity curve attributable to the cracking of the noninterleaved core during impact. Here, the lower upward velocity after impact (as compared with the control specimens with the interleaved core) indicates higher energy loss, mainly due to the failure process in the sandwich core.

High Velocity (Ballistic) Impact Test

Ballistic tests were conducted by using an air-gun device. Air pressure (up to 1.03 MPa) was fed to a chamber in which it was restrained by a thin plastic diaphragm. At a predetermined pressure level, the diaphragm was ruptured by electrical heating and

the air was released. The abrupt air expansion accelerated a sabot/impactor combination along the 1.79-m tapered barrel which caught the sabot at its end. After a short free flight, the 17-g impactor collides with a simply supported sandwich beam specimen. The terminal velocities obtained, which were controlled by the air pressure, ranged from 40 to 160 m/s. The velocity was measured by digital clocks activated by trip wires located at three positions close to the barrel edge. Both the impactor and the sandwich beam had the same composition and geometry as those used for the drop-weight, low velocity impact test.

Impact Damage Characterization

After impact loading, each specimen was inspected visually and the external dimensions of the damage were measured, namely: the damage size and its depth. In most cases, the damage shape was close to circular and the average diameter was considered to be a measure of its size. Maximum damage depth was measured by a special indicator to an accuracy of 0.01 mm. Different specimens, representative of the overall impact range, were sectioned through the damage center for internal inspection of the damage sandwich. Typical photographs of external and internal damage surfaces for the interleaved specimens are shown in Figs. 7 and 8 and will be discussed later.

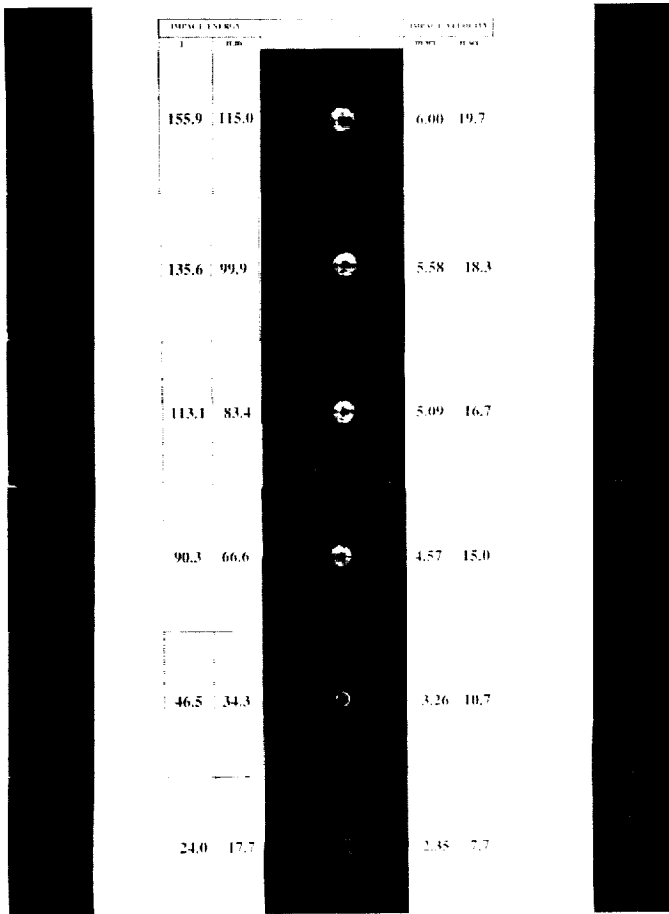


FIG. 7—External (top) view of damage for interleaved core sandwich specimens subjected to different low velocity impact energy levels.

IMPACT DAMAGE IN COMPOSITE SANDWICH PANELS WITH INTERLEAVED FOAM CORE (CROSS-SECTION VIEW)





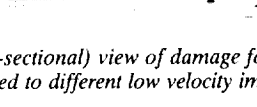
IMPACT ENERGY			IMPACT VELOCITY	
J	ft.lb		m/sec	ft/sec
155.9	115.0		6.00	19.7
113.1	83.4		5.09	16.7
68.7	50.7		3.96	13.0
46.5	34.3		3.26	10.7
24.0	17.7		2.35	7.7

FIG. 8—Internal (cross-sectional) view of damage for interleaved core sandwich specimens subjected to different low velocity impact energy levels.

Residual Strength Testing

Following external damage inspection, the specimens were loaded to ultimate failure in four-point flexure using an MTS test system. In all cases, the sandwich was placed so as to load the damaged skin in compression. Constant cross-head speed of 1.84 mm/min was maintained during the test. An illustrative description of the flexural system is shown in Fig. 9. The relevant values of the skin compressive stress at sandwich failure (SSSF) and the core shear stress at sandwich failure (CSSF) were derived from the ultimate load P_u value based on the simplified sandwich beam formulations. A classical sandwich analysis was used for the derivation of stress formulation given in Fig. 9. It is justified due to the high stiffness ratio between the CFRP skin and the interleaved core (above 30).

Skin stress at skin failure (SSSF) is the maximum effective stress acting on the upper side of the skin laminate cross section at failure. The SSSF value represents the residual compressive strength (RCS) of the damaged skin laminate and the residual strength of the sandwich. The skin laminate is treated here macroscopically as a quasi-homogeneous material under uniaxial stress loading. The load-deflection relationship was linear to failure which was catastrophic and brittle. Hence, maximum stress criterion was found to be adequate.

Test Results

Test results and their evaluation are involved with several variables and characteristics which may be classified into three main groups, namely: impact variables, damage characteristics, and residual strength variables. A detailed list of these variables is given in Fig. 10.

Impact Damage Assessment

The protective glass fabric-epoxy layers on the external skin surfaces were found to be highly sensitive to the impact loading which left clear imprints whose dimensions varied with the impact magnitude (see Fig. 7). The boundaries of these imprints seems to be dictated by the contact surface between the impactor tip and the specimen. The dimensions of internal interfacial debonded area measured from the cross-sectioned specimens (Fig. 8) were found to match approximately the respective external imprint sizes at all impact levels. It was concluded that this type of coating may provide an excellent tool for impact damage inspection and assessment in a real structure, where skin damage is the predominant failure mode. In all cases, tested skin impact damage was confined to a well-defined local zone which was almost circular. The predominant failure modes were transverse cracking and delaminations which did not propagate beyond the externally defined damage zone (see Fig. 11). In the case of the specimens with interleaved core, initiation of core cracking originating from the skin damage zone could be detected (Fig. 11). This cracking process seems to be arrested by the internal interleaves which were slightly damaged at high impact levels. These findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the interleaving process for either preventing or delaying core failure. In the case of the plain (noninterleaved) core specimens, cracks developed through the core depth which were activated by the combined action of tensile curing stresses and shear stresses induced by the flexural impact. A typical pattern of such cracking is shown in

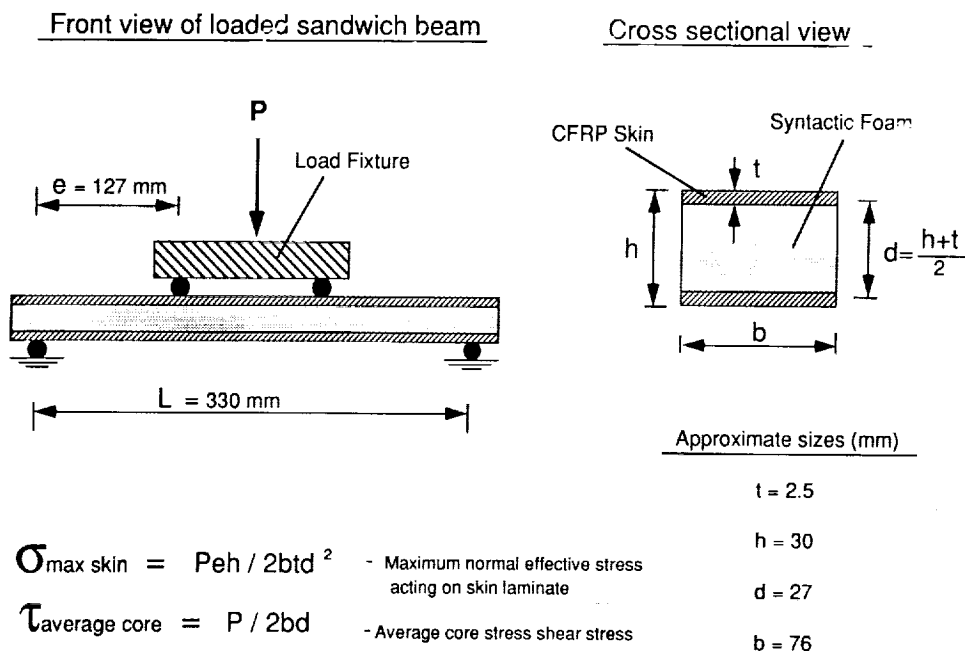


FIG. 9—Flexural test setup and formulation for derivation of residual strength.

Impact Variable

- Impact Energy (input) U_i - Derived from experimental energy plot (fig. 4)
- Impact Velocity (input) V_i - Derived from experimental velocity plot (fig. 4)
- Energy Loss (response) ΔU - Computed from input and output velocity difference

Damage Characteristics

- Damage Size (diameter) D_s - Average diameter of visual external damage (fig. 7)
- Damage Depth d - Maximum depth of skin damage crater (fig. 11)
- Damage Area $A_d = \pi D_s^2 / 4$
- Failure modes (Skin, Core or Interfacial)

Residual Strength Variables

- Skin max. compressive stress at skin failure SSSF
- Skin max. compressive stress at core failure SSCF
- Core max. shear stress at skin failure CSSF
- Core max. shear stress at core failure CSCF

FIG. 10—List of test variables.

Figs. 12 and 13 for the plain core version as compared with its interleaved counterpart.

The Effect of Impact Variables on Damage Characteristics

In general, three parameters may be used to define skin damage geometry, namely: size (average diameter), area, and depth (see Fig. 10). In the case of interleaved core sandwiches, all of these were found to increase continuously with impact energy and energy loss. Figures 14 and 15 show the effect of these variables on damage area and depth which may be representative for the overall damage geometry. It may be concluded from these relationships that the impact energy variable, and especially its energy loss component, have a direct, almost proportional, effect on damage area and depth. The effect of impact velocity and deceleration were less at low levels but become much more pronounced at the higher range. Damage size did not generally exceed the diameter of impactor tip.

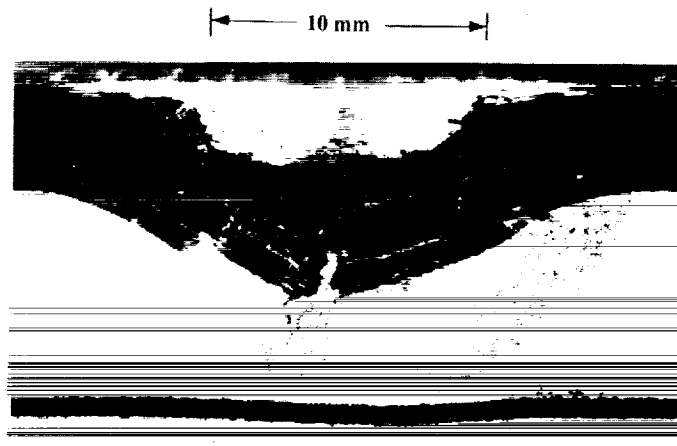


FIG. 11—Typical cross-sectional view of low velocity impact damage for composite sandwich with interleaved syntactic foam core (impact velocity: 6m/s; impact energy: 156 J).

Ultimate Failure and Residual Strength of Damaged Specimens Loaded in Flexure

In most cases of interleaved core sandwiches, ultimate failure was due to skin damage. Such failure was found to be a complex combination of three modes (see Fig. 16), namely, in-plane shear fracture along 30°, sublaminar delamination and buckling, and interlaminar separations between the CFRP laminate and GFRP fabric interleaf and external layers. Failure seems to originate always from the impact damage site. With few exceptions, premature shear core failure was the predominant mode (see Fig. 16). This was also the prevalent failure mode for the plain core sandwich version. Residual strength was determined by the value of skin compressive stress at sandwich failure (SSSF) which was computed by the approximate formulation given in Fig. 9. The

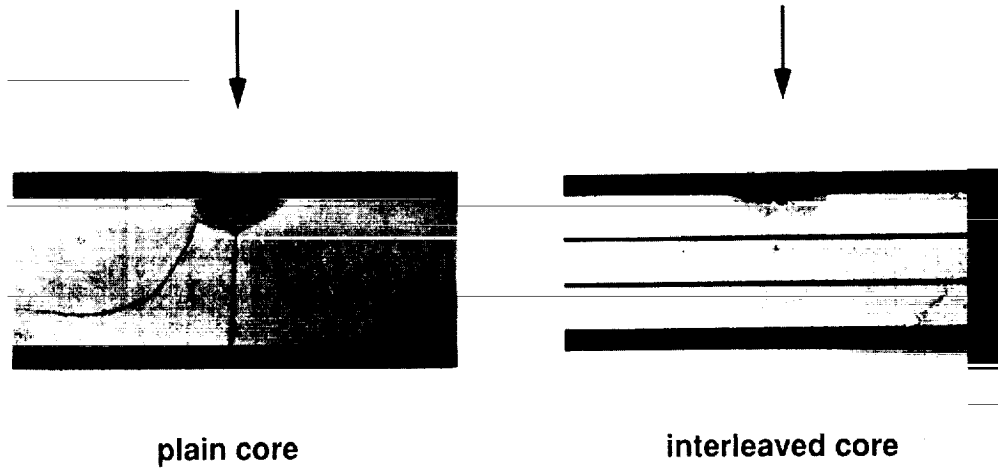


FIG. 12—Comparison of impact damage for interleaved versus plain foam core composite sandwiches, cross-sectional view (impact energy: 68.7 J).

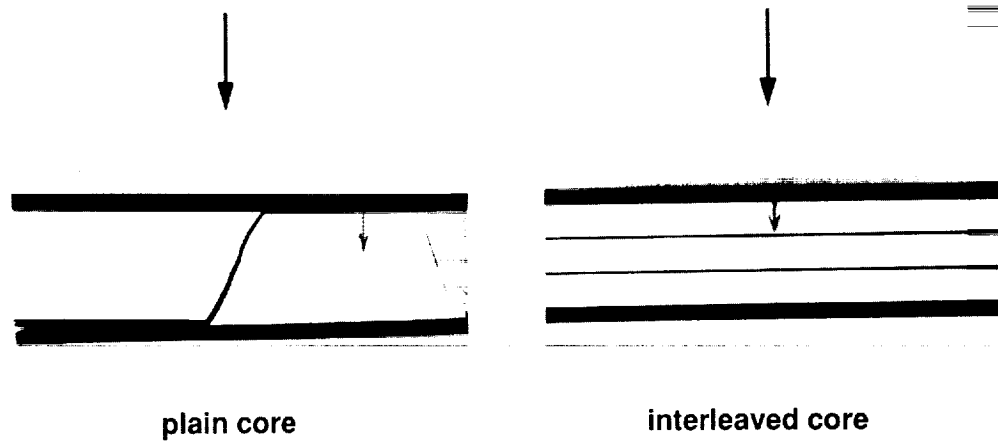


FIG. 13—Comparison of impact damage for interleaved versus plain foam core composite sandwiches, side view (impact energy: 68.7 J).

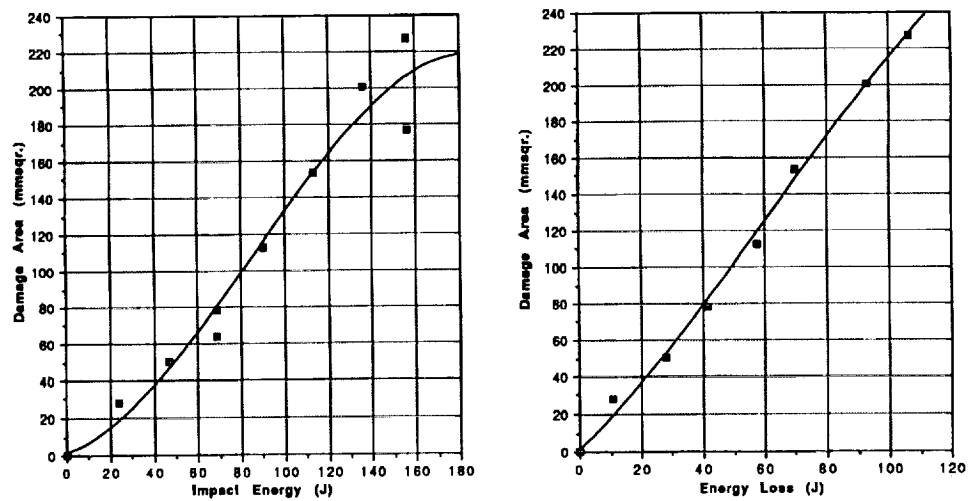


FIG. 14—The effect of low velocity impact energy and energy loss on damage area.

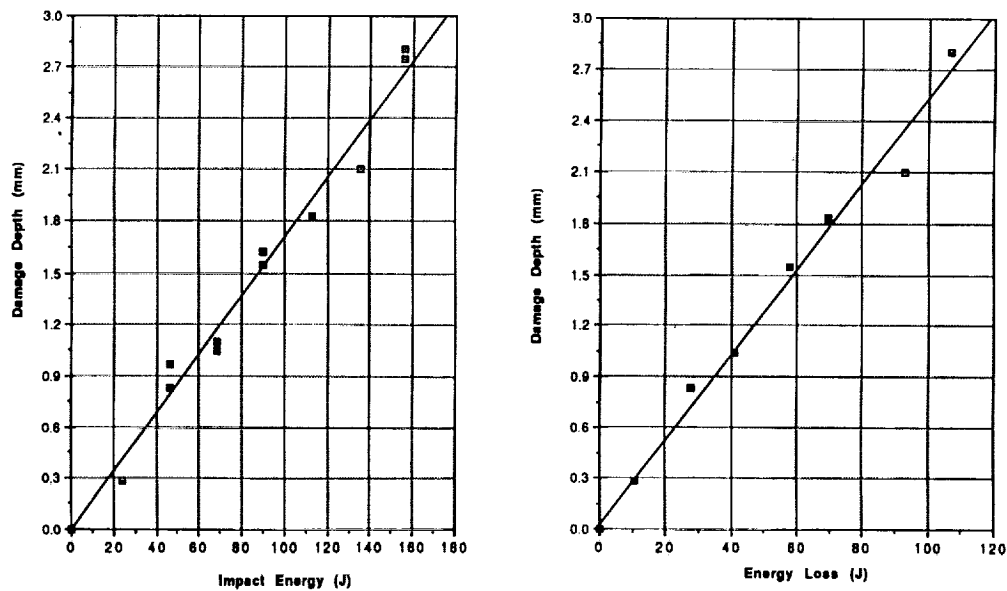


FIG. 15—The effect of low velocity impact energy and energy loss on damage depth.

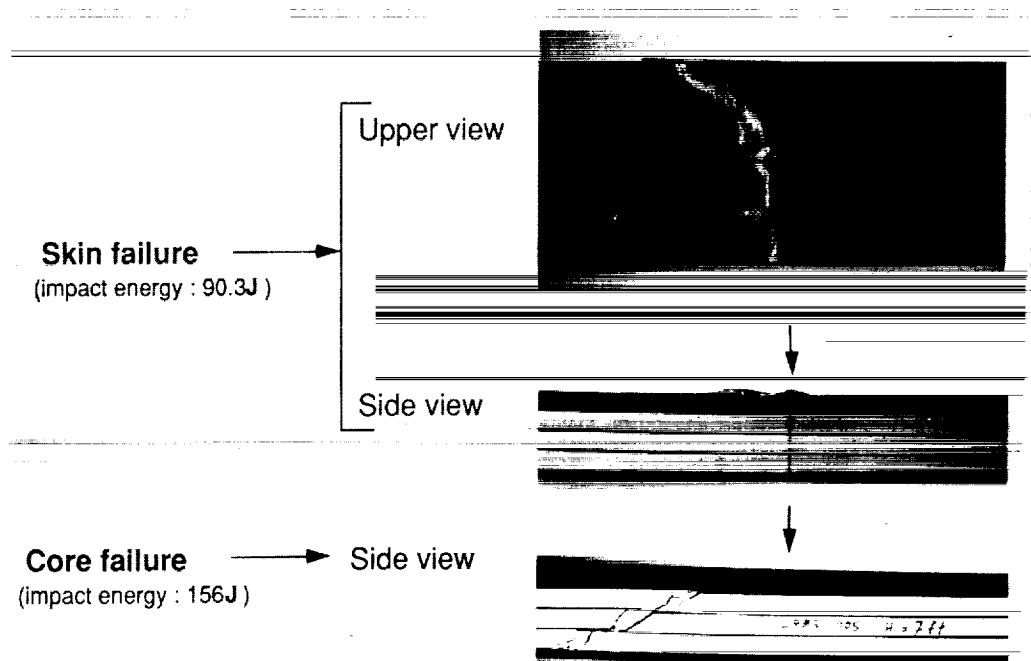


FIG. 16—Typical failure modes in residual strength test.

effects of damage characteristics and impact energy on SSSF for interleaved sandwich specimens damaged under low velocity impact are shown in Figs. 17 and 18. The trend common for all these relationships is the high rate of residual strength reduction at low impact values and the tendency to level off at the upper impact range. Residual strength levels of interleaved sandwich specimens that failed by core cracking are close to those obtained for cases of skin failure (Fig. 18).

Evaluation of Experimental Findings

Three main topics are dealt with in the present study, namely: the effect of interleaving, the comparison between low and high impact velocity, and mainly, the dependence of residual strength on damage and impact variables. The significant beneficial effect of interleaving on improving residual strength is clearly demonstrated in Fig. 19. The limited and scattered data for the plain

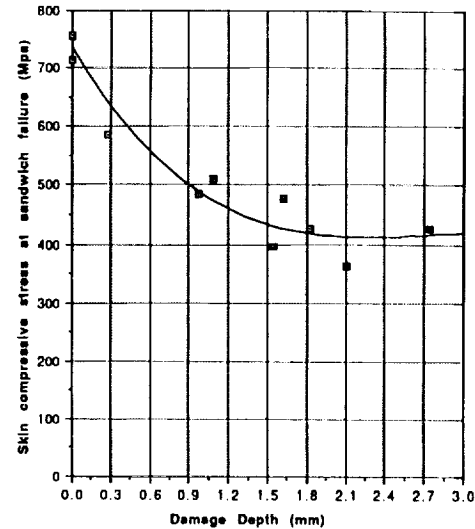
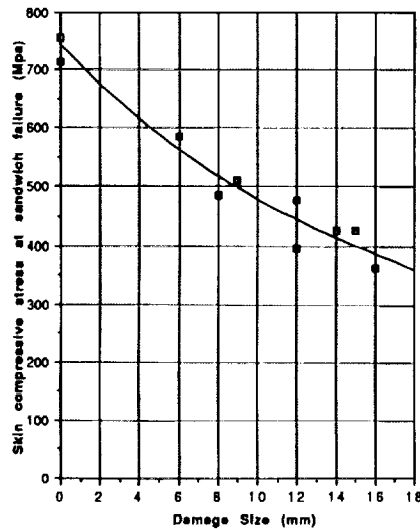


FIG. 17—The effects of damage size and depth on residual compressive strength of sandwich skin for interleaved core specimens subjected to low velocity impact.

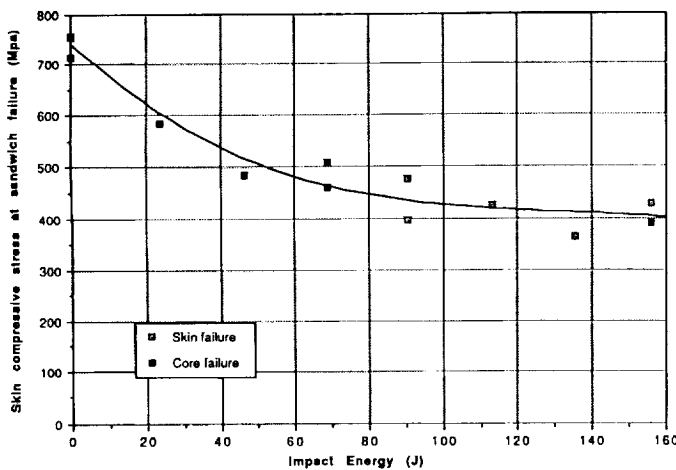


FIG. 18—The effect of impact energy on residual strength of sandwich panels with interleaved core subjected to low velocity impact.

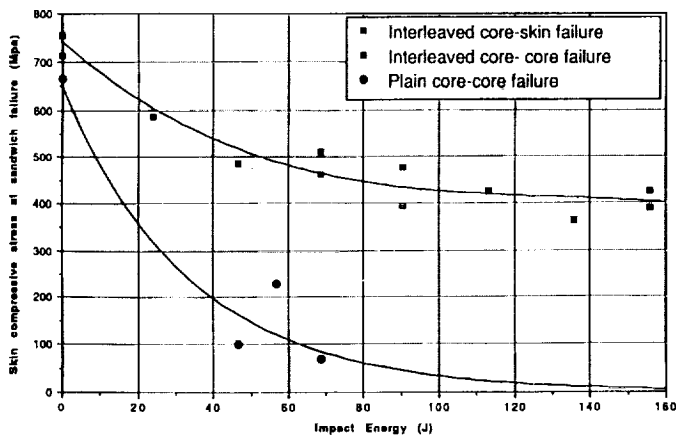


FIG. 19—The effect of low velocity impact energy on residual strength of sandwich panels (with plain versus interleaved foam core).

core sandwich specimens was due to premature cracking in the core which was not only caused by low impact energy but also by residual curing stresses as well. In most such cases, the disintegrated core could not support the skins and was unable to transfer stresses. Consequently, the sandwich had a very low stiffness and residual strength that did not reflect the structural potential of the CFRP skin. The interleaved core specimens, on the other hand, retained the expected residual strength and stiffness of the damaged skin even in cases of core failure. More than 50% of the original strength was retained at the higher level of impact energy applied at low velocity impact range (155 J).

Comparing the effect of impact velocity on residual strength as derived from drop-weight and ballistic tests (Fig. 20) revealed similar trends in spite of the large order of magnitude (≈ 25) difference in velocity between the two tests. This finding indicates that impact energy rather than velocity seems to be the prevailing variable that affects damage and residual strength. This premise is supported by plotting the data of residual strength versus impact energy derived from both low and high impact velocity tests on the same coordinates as shown in Fig. 21. Both sets of data are well intermingled within a single curve fit in spite of the fact that they were derived at widely different range of velocities and impactor weights. One of the main concerns in maintaining a damage-sensitive structural element is the ability to detect the occurrence, location, and size of an impact event. This information is needed for the decision whether to ignore, repair, or replace the damaged element, based mainly on evaluation of residual strength. An appropriate tool for this prediction is the "open hole model" as was demonstrated in Ref 26. The circular shape of the impact damage found in the present investigation justifies the use of the analytical solution of this model as formulated in Ref 43. The experimental data of residual strength versus normalized damage size for low velocity and ballistic impact tests is plotted and compared with the analytical prediction from Refs 43 and 44 (see Fig. 22). A full description of the analytical formulation for the present case is given in Ref 45. Good agreement between experiment and analysis for sizes up to the diameter of the impactor is evident. Note that the ana-

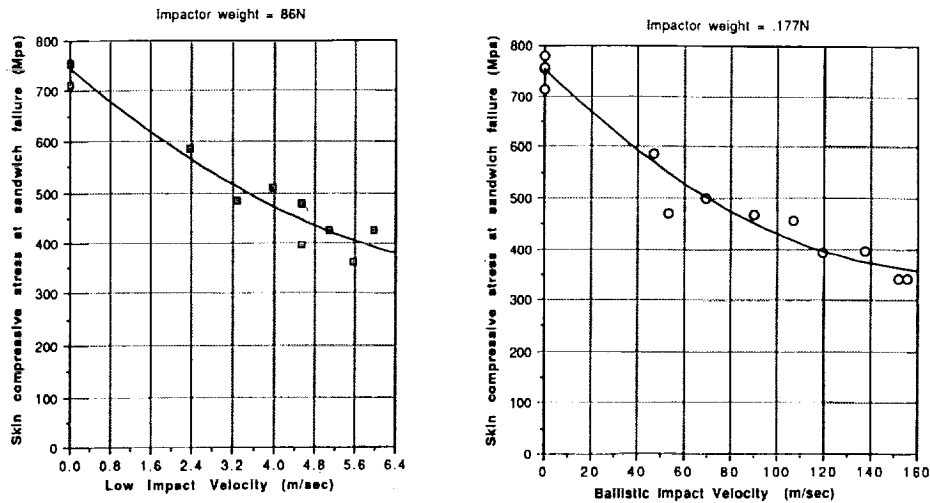


FIG. 20—The effect of impact velocity on residual compressive strength of sandwich skin (low velocity versus ballistic impact tests).

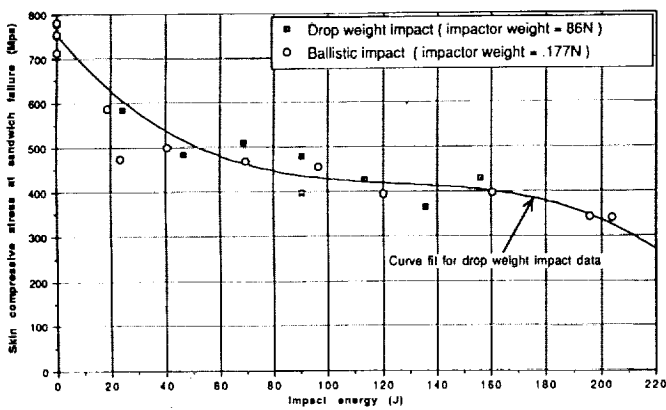


FIG. 21—The effect of impact energy on residual strength of sandwich panels with interleaved cores.

lytical model is for a plate of infinite width, whereas the present element is a finite-strip skin supported by a core. In spite of these reservations, it appears that the analytical prediction is valid for damage sizes smaller than one fourth of the sandwich width.

Conclusions

Based on the experimental results and their evaluation, the following conclusions may be drawn relating mainly to the damage tolerance performance of a composite sandwich system with an interleaved syntactic foam core suitable for elevated temperature applications.

- Damage tolerance performance is significantly improved by core interleaving.
- Impact failure is controlled by local skin damage, which can be inspected visually.

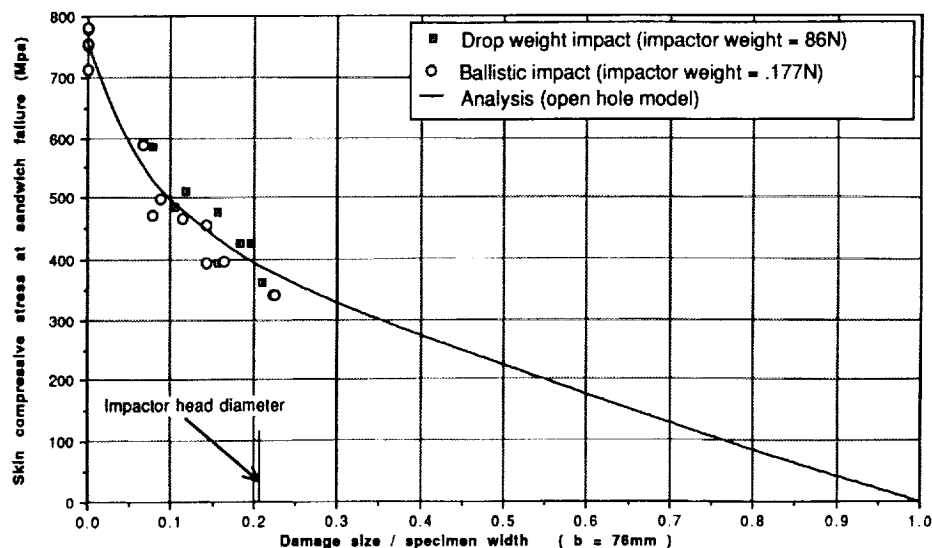


FIG. 22—The effect of normalized damage size on residual compressive strength of sandwich skin (low velocity and ballistic impact test results versus analytical solution).

- Residual strength decreases with impact energy down to about 50% of the original (at an energy level of 160 J).
- Damage and residual strength are directly dependent on impact energy rather than impact velocity or impactor weight.
- Damage size and residual strength are affected in the same way by both low velocity and ballistic impact energy.
- Residual strength may be predicted by visual measurements of damage size.

Acknowledgment

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Designer's Corner

Short contributions of less than 1000 words plus key illustrations are being invited, covering topical issues associated with the design and application of composites. Notable designers from a broad range of industries including aerospace, automotive, civil, bioengineering and recreational are encouraged to submit a contribution to this section. Communications may cover, but not necessarily be restricted to, the following subjects:

- novel and innovative concepts in composites design and fabrication;
- economics issues and other impediments to the wider exploitation of composites;

- selection approaches for the various available fibre architectures and processes;
- choice of failure criteria used for establishing integrity of composite products;
- effective concurrent engineering approaches.

Contributions will be subject to a rapid review and publication process. Prospective contributions, marked for the 'Designer's Corner', should be submitted to: Dr Keith T. Kedward, Department of Mechanical & Environmental Engineering, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106, USA. Fax: 1 (805) 893 8651

Composite sandwich construction with syntactic foam core

A practical assessment of post-impact damage and residual strength

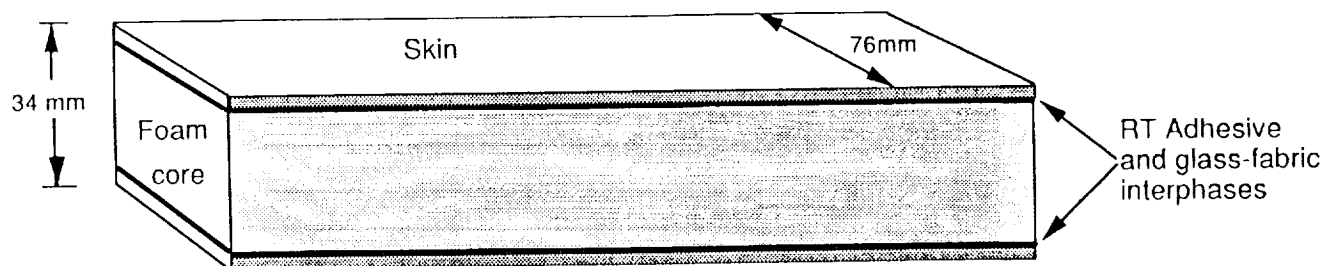
C. HIEL, D. DITTMAN and O. ISHAH

(NASA Ames Research Center, USA)

Most composite sandwich constructions with a light-weight core are difficult to reliably inspect for post-impact damage. Additionally the residual strength cannot easily be estimated, and therefore aeronautical

designers tend to prefer a skin-stringer type arrangement for primary load-bearing structures.

The purpose of this note is to report on a successful



Skins composition : CFRP - Rigidite 5245C/G40-600 **Lay-up :** (0/+30/-30)_{3s}
+ GFRP Fabric - 7781-5245C - 2 external layers (for surface protection)

Core composition : Syntactic foam - Syntac 350 (glass micro balloons in epoxy resin)

Interphases composition : Hysol EA9394 Adhesive + GFRP Fabric

Fig. 1 Sandwich configuration with syntactic foam core

inspection method for sandwich panels with syntactic foam core and to summarize a procedure for the practical assessment of post-impact damage and residual strength.

A syntactic foam core is a composite itself, since it often contains 50% (by weight) of hollow glass or ceramic microspheres in a thermoset matrix. A disadvantage is that its weight is typically four to eight times higher than that of the traditional foams used in aerospace applications. One main advantage is that the mechanical properties of syntactic foams are several orders of magnitude higher than those of the lighter (traditional) foams¹. Sandwich construction with syntactic foam core therefore provides a sensible approach for land- or marine-based applications, where damage tolerance and residual strength, rather than weight savings, dominate the design requirements.

After a feasibility study conducted at NASA Ames Research Center, the concept shown in Fig. 1 was selected as the basis for the design of highly damage-tolerant composite wind tunnel compressor blades. Hybrid glass fibre-reinforced plastic/carbon fibre-reinforced plastic (GFRP/CFRP) composite skins were bonded onto a syntactic foam core. Details of the materials together with manufacturing and test procedures are given elsewhere^{1,2}.

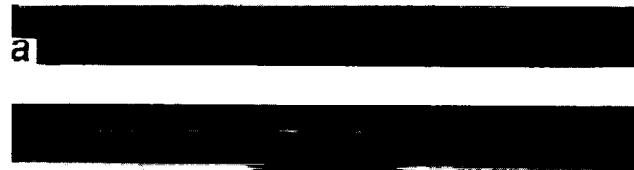
Extensive low- and high-velocity impact tests revealed that the damage was always localized and confined. This confinement, as shown in Fig. 2, is due to the energy-absorbing capacity of the glass microspheres which are part of the syntactic foam core. Additionally, as shown in Fig. 3, the imprint formed at the GFRP external surface is localized and clearly visible to the unaided eye. This visibility is due to local delamination, over an area which is slightly elliptical (with major axis D), at the hybrid GFRP/CFRP skin interface and has a practical significance, as is demonstrated below.

This technical note will address two specific issues: First, what makes this sandwich system damage tolerant? Second, how can the residual compressive strength after impact be determined?

Analytical models to predict the residual strength of open-hole composite samples as a function of hole size are available in several publications³⁻⁵. Fig. 4(a) shows an impact-damaged skin and Fig. 4(b) shows a skin in which a hole of diameter D was drilled. The residual strengths of both specimens were found to be equivalent for D ranging between 10 and 20 mm. This in turn suggests that the imprints on the GFRP skin coating are a replica of the damage; hence, a measure of the imprint size will allow the prediction of the residual strength of an impact-damaged sandwich.

The localized and confined nature of the impact damage is attributed to the high energy-absorption capacity of the syntactic foam. Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) reveals that most of the impact energy is consumed through crushing of the glass microspheres. This failure mechanism reigns within a hemispherical zone, which is centred at the point of impact and spreads downwards into the syntactic foam core material. This zone is defined by the discolouration of the core, as shown in Fig. 2, which is evidently due to the failed microspheres.

a



b



c



d



e

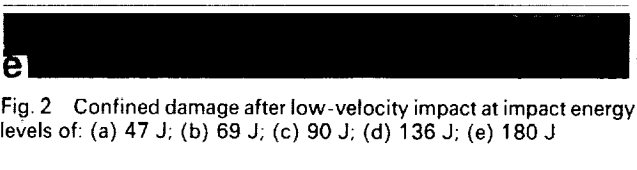


Fig. 2 Confined damage after low-velocity impact at impact energy levels of: (a) 47 J; (b) 69 J; (c) 90 J; (d) 136 J; (e) 180 J

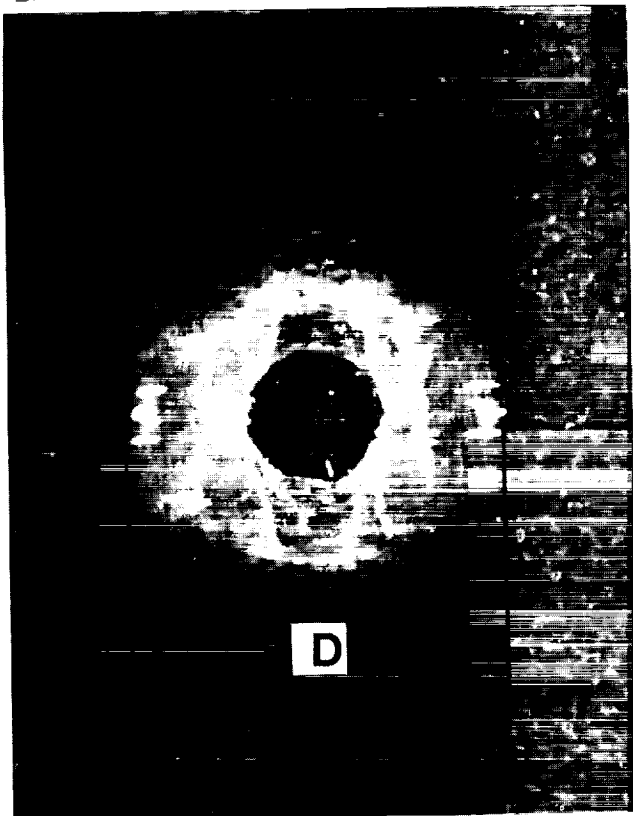


Fig. 3 Damage imprint at the external GFRP surface

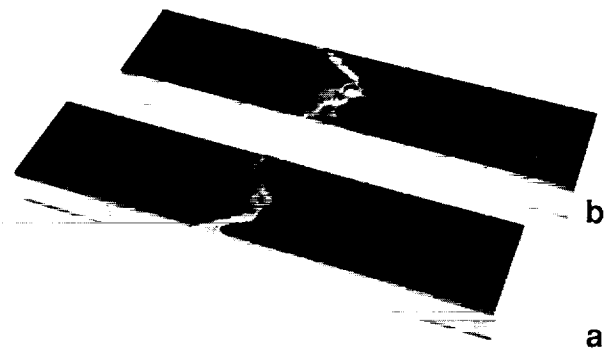


Fig. 4 Comparison of sandwich skins with impact damage and open hole

This is seen from the enlarged micrograph of Fig. 5(a), which was taken inside the discoloured zone, in contrast to Fig. 5(b) which was taken outside this zone.

SEM was also used to observe the microstructural pattern of the impact damage. Micrographs of cross-sections in Fig. 6 show the damage for five (low-velocity) impact energy levels. The CFRP skin damage zone can be clearly observed and compared with the GFRP imprint size and the core damage size. Results of these measurements are shown in Fig. 7. A good correlation between external (GFRP) imprint size and internal (CFRP) damage size is

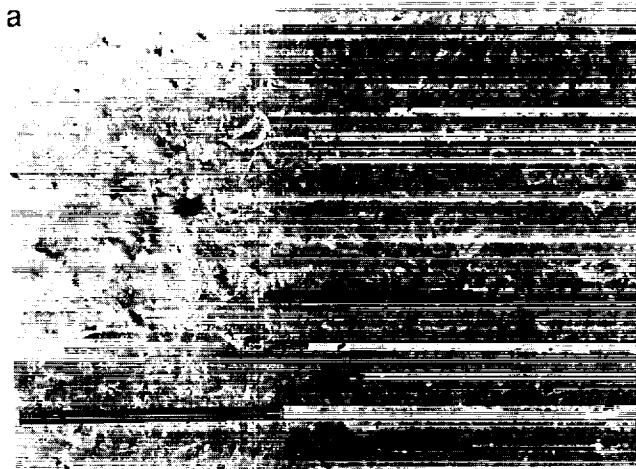


Fig. 5 SEM micrographs taken (a) inside discoloured zone and (b) outside discoloured zone

evident whereas the core damage size (defined by the extent of discolouration) is consistently larger.

Thus highly damage-tolerant sandwich constructions can be obtained by using hybrid composite skins and a syntactic foam core. This is achieved by localization of the damage due to the high absorption of impact energy via crushing of the glass microballoons. The local region of skin failure may be represented by an external imprint that is clearly visible to the unaided eye. Post-impact strength can be predicted by direct measurement of the imprint size using available open-hole theories.

The concept which was suggested for the design of highly damage-tolerant wind tunnel compressor blades combines three material phases with specific purposes:

- 1) CFRP skins, which are the structural backbone, to provide high specific strength and stiffness;
- 2) syntactic foam core which has high mechanical properties and therefore provides an excellent shear tie between the skins. Additionally it supports the skins against buckling, localizes the impact damage and absorbs energy through a microballoon crushing mechanism; and
- 3) GFRP fabric which acts as a sacrificial protective coating for the CFRP and serves as a visual enhancement of impact damage for residual strength assessment.

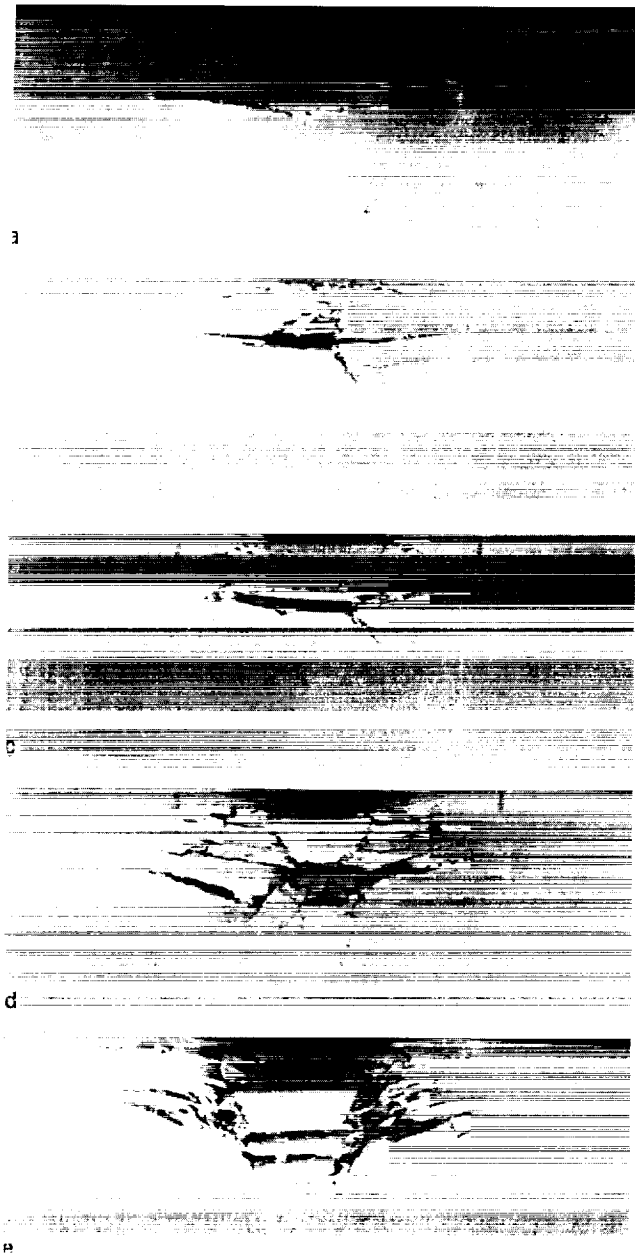


Fig. 6 SEM micrographs of localized damage for five (low-velocity) impact energy levels: (a) 47 J; (b) 69 J; (c) 90 J; (d) 136 J; (e) 180 J

The design with syntactic foam may be appropriate for many applications where the design is driven by damage tolerance rather than by weight. The findings presented here indicate that concepts and design notions valid for

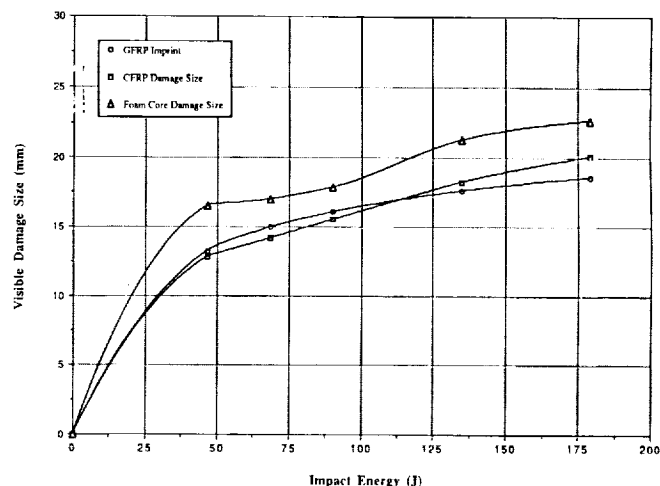


Fig. 7 Effect of low-velocity impact energy on damage size in GFRP, CFRP and foam core

aerospace-type constructions need to be modified when transferring technology to a land-based application.

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